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*In Your Mother's Eyes* is rooted in the overwhelming peace I have found since giving birth to my first baby, Jayden. Through the display of growth, the progression of time, and emotional and physical perception, I am symbolically and literally creating representations of this new life as a mother and the tensions between the good it brings and the fears of not knowing how to be a good mom or what is best for a child. Created using the Procreate app on an iPad, digitally illustrated animations showcase the movement and repetition of time as I, the mother, am living by the sensitivity of time itself.

IN YOUR MOTHER'S EYES

by

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Approved by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Motherhood to me extends beyond simply being a mother. It is about a mother's mind, body, and entire being, which comes with a unique sense of responsibility. While I believe many mothers feel the same way I do, the difference is in the ways I have chosen to express it. There is a connection that emerges alongside motherhood, as time plays a huge part in being a mother, which competes with the time used in being an artist. Motherhood is a relatively new subject that I am exploring, as I am currently experiencing it for the first time. This experience has become a driving force for me to further explore and express myself in my artwork. A major lesson associated with first-time motherhood is learning to value the time I have, alongside learning how to manage it more efficiently. To accommodate this aspect of time, I have shifted from a more traditional style of painting on canvas to producing digital work.

Initially considered to be a challenge resulting from this shift is that the space of the work is smaller than my previous methods. As I have adjusted to this difference in size, I have become increasingly aware of how space is being utilized in my work. While focusing on a limited space, there has been more conscious reflection within my creative process to counter the downsizing in both viewing and creating. I originally chose digital work for its convenience, but as I have become acquainted with a program called "Procreate," I have learned a great deal in terms of program, such as learning how to

draw through digital means, using the brushes in the program, and creating collages within the drawing by cutting and pasting the images that I have drawn out to create a scene. I eventually decided to continue utilizing this tool to create animated work. The program at hand allows me to create work in a GIF format, where it can be showcased without a stopping point. The infinity loop of the gif format demonstrates that the sense of responsibility will always be there. It also represents the caretaking notion of motherhood and the passing of time. As each piece in this format begins with the underlying theme of never-ending responsibility, I am able to use a wide array of details and imagery to express the tasks which seem the most pressing in my daily life as a mother. This concept has taken form in a variety of ways, including references to the physical connection between mother and child, the days of the week on repeat, and the presence of a child's toys in multiple pieces, constantly moving and brought into the spotlight. My own sense of confinement at the hands of routine and responsibility is also showcased using grid-like patterns in the work. While maintaining a certain amount of give, the grid never breaks, as I am bound by my own obligations. The tools needed to create art in a digital form include an iPad, an Apple pencil, and the program Procreate. I also use my phone to photograph moments of inspiration. The Procreate program has many different digital brushes, and colors, and I am able to create different textures that resemble more traditional painting and drawing on paper.

What I find so appealing about digital art is that I can create using my iPad in even the smallest breaks. During this time, I can plan out what I want to paint digitally by taking multiple photos on my phone, drawing what I want, and leaving out the aspects I

find less desirable to create a more visually appealing process and result. As I tend not visually to plan out what I want on a canvas, the digital format helps me view my work in a way oriented toward trial and error, largely due to the ease in erasing anything that I do not want from the final artwork itself. In the process of creating the videos, I would construct the animation in Procreate, screen record the movement, and finally, edit the product in iMovie for the film. It is a very time-consuming process, but I enjoy the system of being able to navigate things on my own, allowing me to be able to do things in my way, even if it is an unconventional way. I am the type of person who always likes to follow the rules laid out by society, but in the space of my practice, I allow myself to break the rules where no one can tell me that I am doing it wrong outside of myself. I have freedom and autonomy. Creating the black and white film has been a truly stress-free experience as I have not had to think about what I want to say, and I am able to let the work speak for itself. To elaborate, I have found comfort in my own ability to express myself through this project. I have been able to produce work that is rooted in creative instinct, conveying feeling through motion. Movement has become a crucial piece of the puzzle in relation to my work and what I hope the audience takes from what I present.

Motherhood has pushed me to value these moments of creation as I balance what is demanded of me and what I desire to do. Outside of the convenience associated with time frames, I am maintaining a safe environment for my child, free of potentially toxic materials and clutter. When creating my work, I have found inspiration in Kaithlyn Redell, Judy Chicago, and Mary Kelly, who utilize motherhood as a theme, alongside reading a book titled *The Motherhood of Art* by Marissa Huber and Heather Kirtland.



This book focuses on various women artists who are also mothers being interviewed about what it is like to be both a mother and an artist. The inspiration for me to create my own work, which relates to larger conversations in the field regarding art and motherhood, is the motivation to move forward and continue with my own artistic practice. Something that helps me greatly in terms of creating work is my son, Jayden, who is always with me. I am inspired by his growth, his excitement, and his presence. I find myself able to connect with Karina Bania, who has two children who were 12 and 9 years old at the time of her interview. She said she felt a surge of inspiration and creativity after she gave birth to her second daughter, allowing her to become much more purposeful with her time and the direction of her art<sup>1</sup>. Even though she works with abstract painting, I am still able to relate to her everyday practice because of her experiences. I know what I want to create and what inspires me to create the work, so it is a matter of letting my intuition carry the rest of the process to create the art. At times, it is difficult to translate the language of “love” I experience for Jayden, as this language varies so greatly from that associated with others. Through motherhood, I have also learned to appreciate what other women go through when they have more than one child, as I feel I am constantly struggling with my one and only Jayden. All of these experiences may be found in my work, as I create through my own circumstances. Bania said, “As an artist and a mother, I work a lot through intuition. I feel my way into situations and decisions.”<sup>2</sup> This is exactly how I aim to approach my own process. The

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<sup>1</sup> Marissa Hubber and Heather Kirtland, *The Motherhood of Art* (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing, 2020), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Marissa Hubber and Heather Kirtland, *The Motherhood of Art* (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing, 2020), 19.

time to create is limited, but I crave creativity and utilize the experiences obtained through motherhood to create work for myself and others.

## CHAPTER II

### WELCOME THE CHANGES

Jayden's presence has changed the way I think and create art. My art process changes as more responsibility is stacked upon my shoulders as each day passes. It is no longer about stretching and priming the canvas. It is not about picking up the paintbrush, not about cleaning the oil paint that does not want to come off of my hands, clothes, face, or hair, and it is definitely not about touching the materials to incorporate in my artwork anymore. The feel of the material, the feel of the paint, the feel of the experimentation, and the process have all disappeared. While I miss these aspects of creating a painting, physically touching the paint, the process of mixing paint, and the surprising moments of "happy accidents," I find reward in my new methodology. What I mean when I say "happy accidents," is when I tried to painting something and it did not turn out the way I imagine it going to look like. However, I decided to keep that accident moment because it gives my painting a character. While vastly different from my previous traditional style of creating, there is an emphasis on learning and understanding in digital work with which I find familiarity. Just as I have worked to layer paint, cover mistakes, and allowed a canvas time to process changes, I have taken this same route in my use of technology. I am finding myself as a new artist throughout the entire process, discovering what works, what does not, and everything in between.

Achieving a balance between being a mother alongside my identity as an artist is the most challenging part of my life thus far. The easier moments are those in which I find myself motivated. This comes when my baby sleeps. As I look at his face resting peacefully, I start to think about what I should do to convey that tender moment and that energy within my own artwork. At times, it feels as if all I have is my son, or I should say, my son consistently maintains all of my attention. I want to do something that records the emotion, energy, and message in the process. Those who share this experience may find themselves in my work, while those who are not able to may find traces of familiarity in my imagery.

Before becoming a mother, I was a woman who fully experienced solitude as she spent hours upon hours in the studio painting, studying, and creating art without worrying about the needs of another human being. Over time, I have grown and experienced a shift in responsibility from personal needs to those of someone almost solely dependent upon my own ability to provide attention, food, and shelter, while also monitoring the baby through every move. The movement of the baby becomes the movement of the mother, whether it be sitting, standing, talking, running, climbing, or anything in between. I do not consider this to be negative, simply overwhelming. It is an amazing transition to make, as I am still in awe, hardly able to believe that I have created this human being from my own body, feeding him from my own breast milk. This experience, this gift I have received, is indescribable. As my perception of motherhood was much less prominent prior to my own experiences in giving birth to my son, I only thought about my own body. I could not have imagined my future worries, the idea that I would have to

lose pieces of myself in order to protect my son safe from chemical harm and mess. My experience often reflects the past memories and associations I have with my own family and upbringing, but the presence of the family that I am involved with currently is stronger because it has been built from my own body and physicality. Likewise, my practice changes according to my child's presence. A great thing about that is I can translate that emotion, that energy into my artwork by telling my story throughout my experience. I have worked to include all the joyous and overwhelming aspects within my work to the best of my ability, attempting to convey the entire spectrum of emotion as I stay true to my experiences.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE RESPONSIBILITIES I NEVER ASK FOR

I had never put much thought into what it would feel like being a mother; everything just comes as a surprise. There has never been any expectation regarding what kind of mother I would be or how I would manage to take care of a child. The thought of these responsibilities did not fully materialize until I realized what my grandmother and my mom must have gone through. I am consistently surprised at how they have made it this far with so many children growing up healthy. My grandmother gave birth to 10 children; her husband passed away in my youngest uncle's youth. She was left with the responsibility to care for all of her children with little assistance. Three of those ten children have passed, leaving seven still living. Three of the seven children are here in the United States, while the remaining four continuing to live in Vietnam.

My grandmother is also residing in Vietnam. As the matriarch, much responsibility falls on her shoulders as she bears the burden of the entire family. *Head of the House* (see Figure 1 in Appendix A) is a piece that was created using my grandmother's face. This idea of the head moving back and forth is that there are so many responsibilities that she maintains, resulting in her being pushed and pulled mentally through negativity. The idea of an entire family, near or far, having high expectations for her because she is the mother. In her trials, she has chosen to grow instead of falter. The idea of separating from her children caused her to gain the strength to deal with different

obstacles that come her way. She is emotionally drained and physically tired but manages to be a stronghold for the family regardless. The grandmother prevents the family from breaking apart. While I have started my own family in the United States, my own roots reside in Vietnamese culture. This being said, there will come a time that the weight of an entire family will rest on my shoulders. The experiences I am having now are stepping stones to maintaining a similar position to that held by my grandmother.

The work *Embrace* (see Figure 2 in Appendix A) stays in the same realm of responsibility relating to protection. When creating this work, I found inspiration in memories of my mom carrying me all the time, taking care of me on her own, as my father was often out of town. I grew up watching her day-by-day taking care of her children on her own. I was able to see my mom being a strong woman, for herself and for us. Thinking of her determination, her bravery is something I admire so much, as her child and as a mother myself. I find myself getting sentimental each time I talk about my mother. She had me at a young age, giving me the chance to see how hard she worked to take care of us, even now as we become parents ourselves. I came to understand that no matter what happens in the world, even in times with little support from others, there is always someone in your life to love and to protect. In sum, I have learned that once becoming my child's world, once I have worked to build a life for myself, I have gained unimaginable responsibilities upon my shoulders as a mother, as a daughter, and as a wife. Visually, the work that can speak to this notion is *Head of the House*. Using my grandmother's head for the work, I hoped to show how I feel as a member of her family

and as someone who will one day inherit that role, even though our experiences differ in terms of responsibility right now.



## CHAPTER IV

### I AM A MOM AFTER ALL

Sometimes I think about who I am as a mother. I want to know and understand where I belong. In motherhood, I am aware that I have responsibilities, but I am not quite sure where to start. My first thought revolves around what it takes to be a “perfect” mom. Obviously, I cannot be perfect, but everyone around me has made a point of telling me how to be a “perfect” or “good” mother. These people around me believe that because I am a mother, I am expected to give up every other aspect of my life. I use my art to combat this idea. For example, *Check* (see Figure 3 in Appendix A) is created as I am the “good” mother who checks the baby’s temperature when he is sick. I sat by his side, multitasking, and made sure he was okay while creating the work.

I feel that I am able to do so much more, and when I am trying to get other things done is when self-representation comes to life in my artwork. I am teaching my child to be independent, despite the fact that he has no idea what it all means at the moment. I try to take care of him, even when I am not there physically. The space I provide for him is not as free, not as open, as he is still too young to be away from me. This connection is heightened by my continued breastfeeding even at one year old. This act focuses on the dramatic change from one body turning into two separate bodies, then becoming one again as I feed him what my own body produces. I have used symbolism to portray this subjectivity in my artwork.

For example, *Trapped* (see Figure 4 in Appendix A) is a piece that was created during my quarantine with baby Jayden. During quarantine, we were isolated in a place where no one was able to help us. This time frame caused me to think about his energy and how he was able to adapt to my schedule and space while also being full of excitement to explore and play—trapped physically but emotionally free. I chose to use an object to represent Jayden and his energy in the work itself using movement. I embody his energy and excitement, ready to leave the space. I utilized the color pink to represent that I am present within the artwork and as its creator, representing my own position in life without using the human form. I showcased my point of view to the audience using different angles, different perspectives to create the wide array of emotions as the viewer looks at the work. Sometimes it is being showcased from the top, from the side, or from afar, depending on how I am attempting to convey my intentions to the audience.

## CHAPTER V

### WHAT TIME DOES FOR ME

The time I spend with my son and the time I have for myself weigh upon me differently. I want to show how time flies every day, encompassing the repetitive aspects and the routine that I follow. The motion in my animation work that was created with this in mind is to show how fast time goes by, as it always feels like I have something to do at every turn. For example, *We Are One* (see Figure 5 in Appendix A) was created during the same time as other works, but I chose to experiment with the lighting, utilizing the animation tools to showcase time while the subject remains fixed, occupying the same spot within the frame. This represents what I do in my day-to-day life, especially as I carry my child with me everywhere, rarely escaping the physical responsibilities of motherhood. Because of the things I have witnessed in the past as a young child, my way of interpreting that concept is by using different textures to the work. Time waits for no one, and my experiences as a mother have caused me to value time in ways I had been unable to previously. The pink ball represents my own energy, displaying my desire to move constantly. I find myself restricted as I keep the baby with me despite my restlessness. Patterns represent the repetition of the things that happen daily, while the light constantly repeats to reference the circle of life as a mother.

*Check* (see Figure 3 in Appendix A) is another example that shows the value and exploration of time. It showcases the view I have maintained through my routine during

the pandemic. The image relates to when I had to wait for my “time” to be able to complete personal tasks and school work. Small amounts of movement happen around me as I wait for my mother-in-law to finish cooking. In those moments, I felt like time was passing extremely slowly. In my own experiences, waiting is like having anxiety, and I find it to be increasingly stressful. In those moments, I plan things in my head about what I will do when it finally reaches the time that I may work on all the tasks outside of motherhood. In this sense, the waiting time is merely a “planning” period. Being a mother maintains a sense of routine despite the occurrences that may be unrelated to caring for my son. *Check* embodies this time in which I sit and watch my son sleep, remaining conscious of his temperature while being very careful not to wake him up.

## CHAPTER VI

### TIME ALONE

Some moments are spent thinking about the time I have alone to reflect, beginning with attempts at conveying feelings rather than direct imagery into each stage of the film. I want to share my experience as a first-time mother by creating completely new experiences in love, connection, responsibility, and time using abstraction throughout this film project. If I were asked to tell you how I am feeling, I am not sure that it would make any sense. To counter my own inability to relay a message verbally, I am pushing my boundaries to display my emotions through sight and perception. One of the works that can explain this is called *Energy* (see Figure 6 in Appendix A). This work is black and white because this is when I think about the existence of the child. The work shows repetition and movement that can be translated to time. It is the process of questioning how the baby exists and the invisible energy that may translate into the connection between mother and child. While there is no figure within the space, the movement is meant to assist the viewer in translating the nostalgic moment when viewing the work.

I use shapes, color, and texture for light, dark, and negative space in the stages to express the emotion that I am feeling at the moment. As time passes, I start to understand what it is like to be a mother, what it is like to be overwhelmed with responsibility. I avoid thoughts of specifics, trying not to put excess stress on myself. In some of my

work, I chose not to focus too much on details, rather to feel the emotion behind these experiences through the utilization of gestures within the drawings, specifically through my animation film. This is used to describe the energy, as well as to narrate the story that happens through the moment of creation. I have also begun to trust my own creative instincts, using only my emotions to draw out whatever comes to mind, thus giving me a heightened sense of freedom of expression. The work that represents this most is one of my animation films titled *Mother and Child Marathon*. This piece was inspired by Matt Bollinger's animation work titled *The House on Weirdfield Street*.<sup>3</sup> I was influenced by his technique of drawing scribbles to create an image, and he uses the sound of the scribbles throughout his animation artwork. I was influenced by that technique to include scribble sound to symbolize me as an artist in my own art animation. When I first created this piece, I followed my intuition and my energy just to draw out whatever came to mind in the moment. I expressed the freedom of movement and freedom of thought to finish the story of what I am doing throughout the day. I have chosen to add a little bit of color at the end of the film to indicate the joy that slowly happens after the more hectic moments come to a close. The color pink characterizes the mother within the film. I used sound to incorporate the creator's existence by adding the audio of me drawing on paper in my attempt to convey my commitment to both motherhood and creation. In the same way, I have utilized audio of a child playing with a toy to bring life to the baby as a subject while also emphasizing the playful sound of responsibility that I associate with it

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1\\_kbptiZYg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1_kbptiZYg), accessed March 24, 2021.

as a mother. This idea comes from the video *David Bowie Narrates Disney's Peter and The Wolf*.<sup>4</sup> Bowie narrates each character using an instrument sound so that the viewer can easily identify the character. Although I did not create an abstract sound for my character, I use the same concept as I define the character in the scene through my own choice of audio. The process of creating the sound in this work felt similar to painting—the technique of layering the sound to create a more rich and powerful visualization, just as I have done in my work both digitally and traditionally.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Va8Uz6MoKLg>, accessed March 24, 2021.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

This work is a result of having to quickly adapt from a world of chemicals and canvas to a world of caution, responsibility, and care. Both rooted in a place of creation, it was only fair that I combine them. I have created work that expresses the responsibilities, the feelings, the entirety of newfound motherhood through my eyes. Creating digitally has allowed me to broaden my abilities to make art, elevated by my experimentation with time, shape, and sound. The content ranges from what I have learned as a mother, to reflecting upon the mothers within my life, to how I fit in with the world around me. I have chosen a variety of ways to express these factors alongside the feelings they produce. Through the influence of artists like Kaitlynn Redell and Mary Kelly, there has been a conscious effort to further push what it means to create work relating to motherhood. Moving forward, I will explore motherhood as a Montagnard woman. (Montagnard is the indigenous peoples of the Central Highlands of Vietnam). That means I will add my culture into my practice. I have started to explore culture in my new work and slowly moving toward painting on canvas while still creating digitally.



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APPENDIX A.  
CATALOG OF IMAGES



Figure A1. *Head of the House*, Digital Painting, 2020.



Figure A2. *Embrace*, Digital Painting, 2020.



Figure A3. *Check*, Digital Painting, 2020.



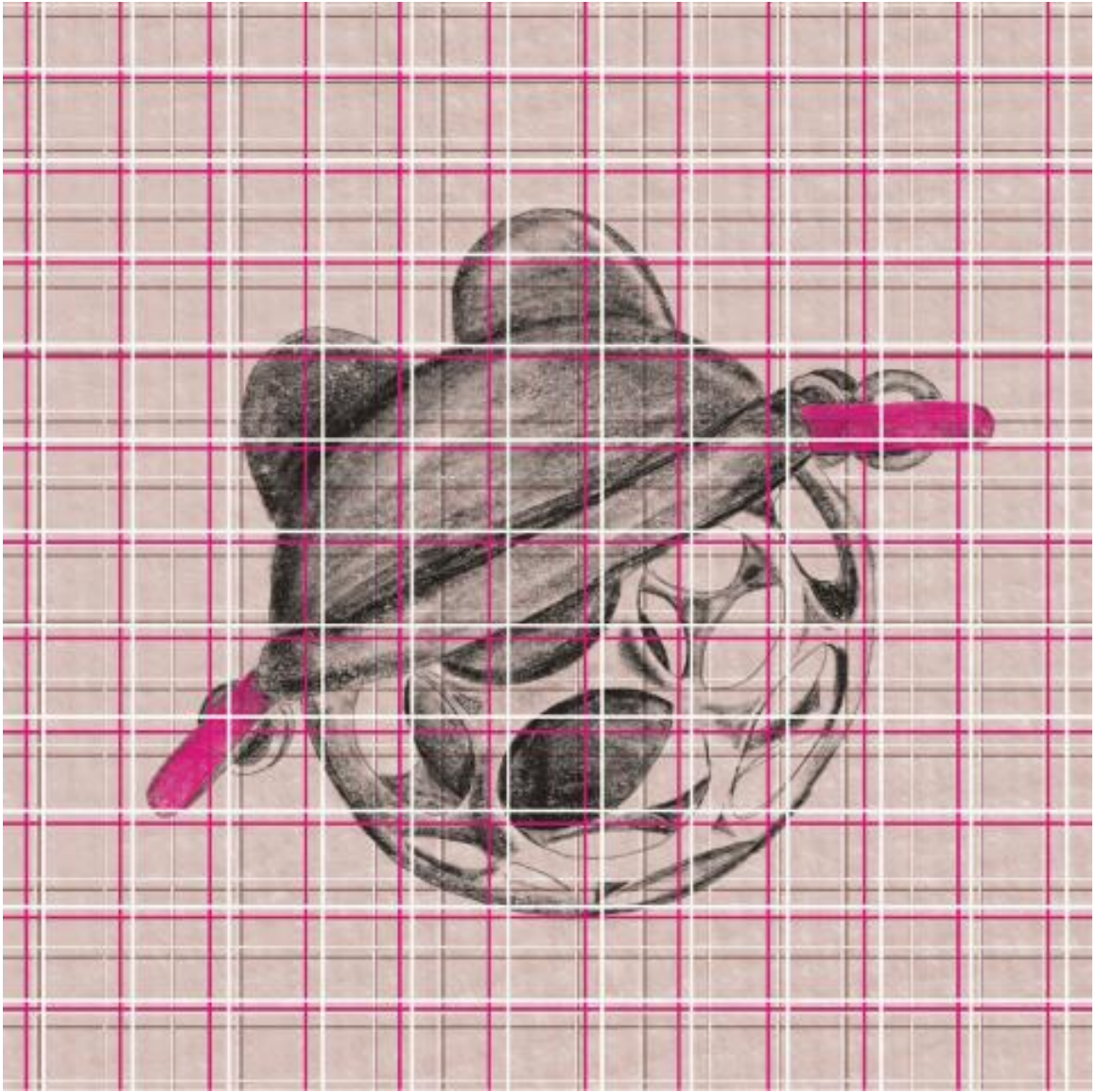


Figure A4. *Trapped*, Digital Painting, 2020.

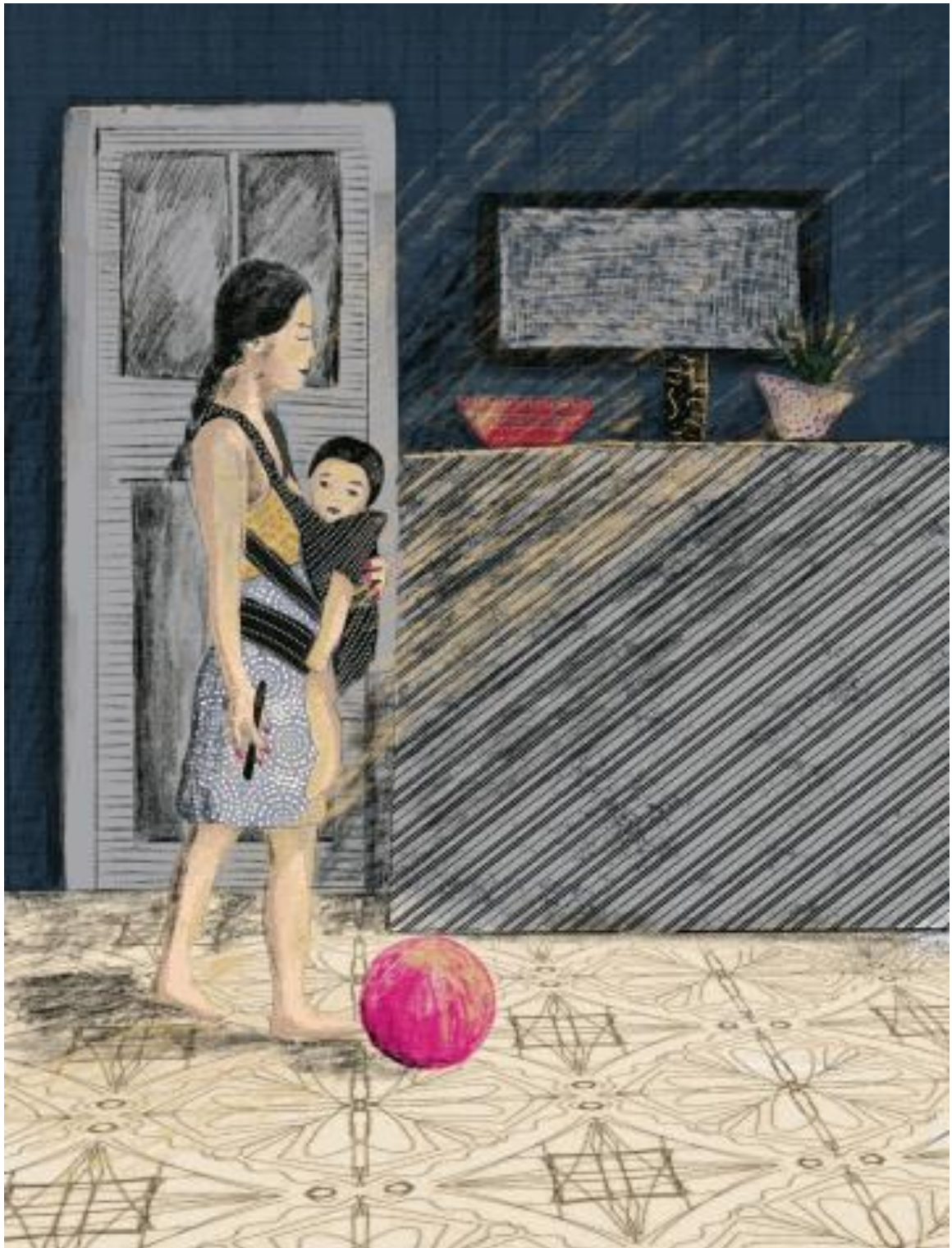


Figure A5. *We Are One*, Digital Painting, 2020.

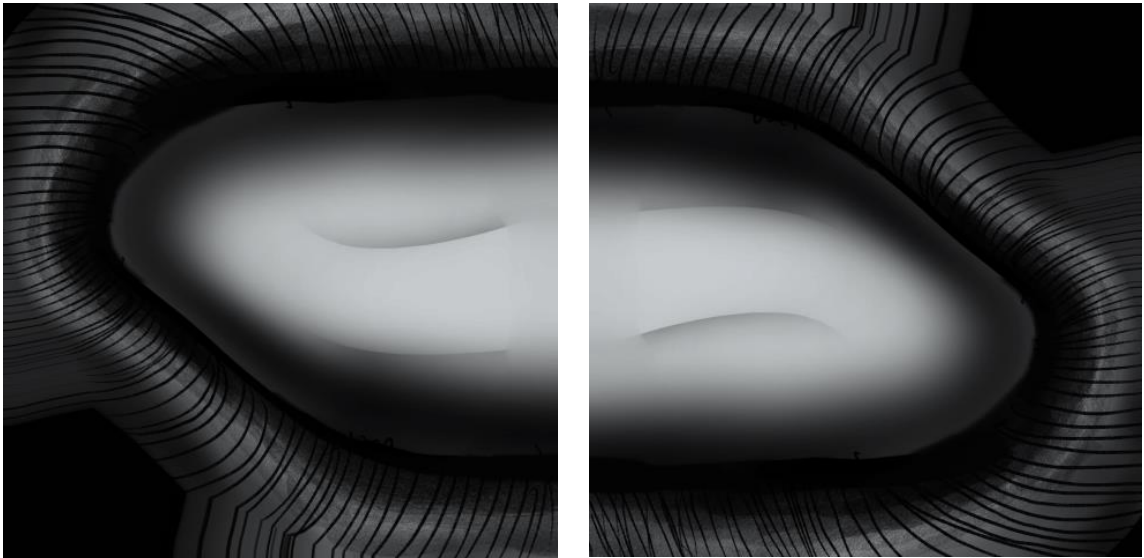


Figure A6. *Energy*, Digital Painting, 2020.